Unit .13

Session .04

The Visions of God's Strength

Scripture

2 Kings 6:8-23

8 When the king of Aram was waging war against Israel,
he conferred with his servants, "My camp will be at such
and such a place." **9** But the man of God sent word to
the king of Israel: "Be careful passing by this place, for the
Arameans are going down there." **10** Consequently, the
king of Israel sent word to the place the man of God had
told him about. The man of God repeatedly warned the
king, so the king would be on his guard. **11** The king of
Aram was enraged because of this matter, and he called his
servants and demanded of them, "Tell me, which one of
us is for the king of Israel?" **12** One of his servants said,
"No one, my lord the king. Elisha, the prophet in Israel,
tells the king of Israel even the words you speak in your
bedroom." **13** So the king said, "Go and see where he is,
so I can send men to capture him." When he was told,
"Elisha is in Dothan," **14** he sent horses, chariots, and a
massive army there. They went by night and surrounded
the city. **15** When the servant of the man of God got up
early and went out, he discovered an army with horses and
chariots surrounding the city. So he asked Elisha, "Oh,
my master, what are we to do?" **16** Elisha said, "Don't be
afraid, for those who are with us outnumber those who
are with them." **17** Then Elisha prayed, "LORD, please
open his eyes and let him see." So the LORD opened
the servant's eyes, and he saw that the mountain was
covered with horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.
18 When the Arameans came against him, Elisha prayed
to the LORD, "Please strike this nation with blindness."
So he struck them with blindness, according to Elisha's
word. **19** Then Elisha said to them, "This is not the way,
and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will take you to
the man you're looking for." And he led them to Samaria.
20 When they entered Samaria, Elisha said, "LORD, open
these men's eyes and let them see." So the LORD opened
their eyes, and they saw that they were in the middle of
Samaria. **21** When the king of Israel saw them, he said to
Elisha, "Should I kill them, should I kill them, my father?"
22 Elisha replied, "Don't kill them. Do you kill those you
have captured with your sword or your bow? Set food and
water in front of them so they can eat and drink and go
to their master." **23** So he prepared a big feast for them.
When they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and
they went to their master. The Aramean raiders did not
come into Israel's land again.

Intro Options

Main Point:
Only God can open our eyes to see spiritual realities.

Option 1

Split your students into two or more teams. You'll need a small ball (golf ball, ping pong ball, tennis ball) for each team (for even more fun, use an egg instead of a ball. You may want to put down a tarp or do this game outside, though). Create a large floorspace area (you could have all the students get up against the walls and use the floor of your meeting room). Each team should choose one volunteer. The volunteer is now blindfolded (you can blindfold them or trust them to keep their eyes shut). Take each ball and put it in a different spot on the floor, preferably far away from the volunteers. When you say go, the blinded volunteers must locate his or her team's ball and bring it back to the team. The only guide they can have is to listen to their teammates giving them instructions on where to go (be sure to remove any potential tripping hazards). Whoever gets the ball back first wins.

After the game, debrief how it went. What made it hard? What would have made it easier? Segue into the lesson by pointing out that blindness is a theme of the lesson, and that only God can open people's eyes to find the treasure of Himself.

Option 2

You'll need drawing materials and access to pictures (e.g., maybe through students' phones). Split your kids into groups of two to four. One student from each group should be the drawer; that student gets the drawing materials. The other student (or students) gets a picture of some kind; you can either supply one, or the student should find a random picture on his or her phone. Very important: the drawer must not see the picture! In the next three minutes, the drawer must draw the picture that the other student has. The student with the picture must describe the picture and tell the drawer what to draw. Afterward, compare the drawings to the original pictures. How close did they get? What made it hard? What made it successful?

Point out how difficult it is to describe something to someone unless he or she has seen it for him- or herself. In today's story, we'll see how important it was for others to see what God's servant sees.

TEACHING PLAN

The story we are about to hear displays the Syrians' constant rebellion to God, who even in their rebellion showed great mercy to them.

Read 2 Kings 6:8-16.

The Syrian king (or kings) had witnessed God's grace yet refused to respond with repentance and faith. God blessed them with success (2 Kings 5:1) in giving them a victory. Another nation, who worshiped other gods, was given victory—not by the power of their gods—but by power from Yahweh. God isn't a small god, only involved with one group of people. He rules over the entire cosmos. Not only that, but God extended salvation. In chapter 5, we read of the incredible healing of Naaman, the Syrian commander. Naaman made a great confession of faith in 2 Kings 5 and his story demonstrates that God saves people from every tribe and tongue if they will believe. Finally, God blessed the Syrians by crushing their pride. We find this reality throughout the story of 2 Kings 6:8-23. Do you know that God humiliates people in order that they may respond to Him in faith? God humbles us that he might save us and use us for His glory.

- **What do these passages about the Syrians teach us about God's heart for the nations?**

One of the ways God humbled the Syrian king was by frustrating his plans. In verses 8–14, we read of the humorous ordeal of Elisha telling the king of Israel the plans of the Syrian king. The Syrian king would make his plans (v. 8), but then somehow Israel would find out about it and avoid defeat (v. 10). The writer says this happened more than once (v. 10b). The Syrian king thought he had a leak in his administration (v. 11). His aide told him that he didn't have a traitor on his team; instead, it was Elisha, who knew the king's conversation (v. 12). God granted Elisha the secret counsel of the Syrian king from many miles away,, and in so doing was protecting His people.

In anger, the king tried to capture Elisha (v. 13). The king's servants went to Dothan, where Elisha was located, and then surrounded the city at night (v. 14). But then God humbled the king by protecting his prophet, and in the events following, humiliated the Syrian raiders. God gave Elisha the eyes to see God's divine army outnumbering the raiders, even though God's army was unseen by others (v. 16).

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 32, DDG)

Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Christian

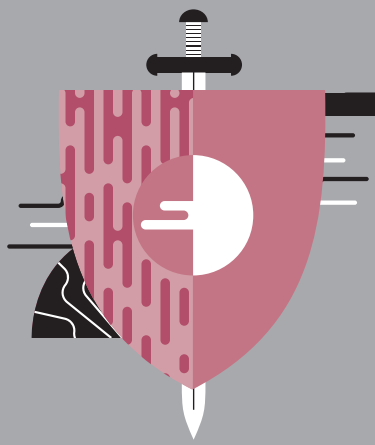
The Spirit's work in the life of a Christian begins in the work of salvation in bringing a person to faith in Christ. It is continued through the work of sanctification in helping the Christian to become progressively more like Christ throughout the course of his or her life. The Spirit also empowers and indwells believers, intercedes on their behalf, and equips them with special gifts for the service of God's kingdom. He is the Comforter to the believer and aids us in properly interpreting the Bible.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Only God can open our eyes to see spiritual realities.

2 Kings 6

8-17. The Arameans became very frustrated because it appeared that the Israelites always anticipated their movements. The king became convinced that one of his officers must have been a traitor who was revealing his plans to the enemy (vv. 8-11). But he was wrong. God was the One revealing their plans to Elisha, who would then warn the king of Israel. The Aramean officers informed their king of what Elisha was doing (v. 12). Determined to put an end to this, the king sent an army with chariots and horses to capture Elisha (vv. 13-14). But this attempt would be no more successful than Ahaziah's attempt to arrest Elijah (1:9-12). If Elisha knew all the king's plans, he must have known of the army coming to arrest him. But he was not disturbed and remained calmly in Dothan. His servant, on the other hand, was overcome with fear when he saw the encircling troops and cried out, "What shall we do?" (6:15). The reason Elisha remained calm was that he knew that God's army, who were on his side, were not only more in number but also more powerful than the Aramean forces. He prayed for the eyes of his servant to be opened so that he could see that they were surrounded by a protective army of horses and chariots of fire—the army of the Lord (vv. 16-17). It may have been one of these same chariots that had appeared when Elijah was taken away (2:11). The Lord's army was there not to fight for the whole of Israel but specifically for Elisha and his servant. Elisha must have understood the truth "if God is for us who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).[1]



In Defense (p. 34, DDG)

There are some who would try to argue that the physical is all there is—nothing immaterial or spiritual. However, this account reveals quite the opposite. In addition to the physical world of matter, there also exists a spiritual reality containing immaterial beings that is just as real and present as its physical counterpart. This is the kind of world God created, consisting of both physical and immaterial, with Himself existing as Spirit (John 4:24). It doesn't take much to recognize the truth of these two different planes to reality—both the immaterial and material. There are plenty of things that we know to be immaterial in essence. Thoughts in our conscious state are an example. Sure, our brains are a part of this process, but the thoughts and ideas we have aren't physical.

TEACHING PLAN

Read 2 Kings 6:17-20.

Elisha saw what his assistant could not see. The assistant must have thought, "How do we battle against that massive army?" Elisha then prayed for the Lord to open his assistant's eyes. God opened his eyes and Elisha's servant saw horses and chariots of fire surrounding Elisha (v. 17). With new vision from God, the servant saw and embraced the reality of God's unseen protection.

- **Why are we tempted to doubt God's protection?**
- **How have you seen God's protection displayed in your life and in the life of others?**

Elisha prayed next for God to deal with the enemy's sight. As a result, God struck the Syrians with blindness according to Elisha's prayer (v. 18b). Elisha assured the enemy that they would find the person they were looking for—which was himself! Then he took them on a ten-mile hike to Samaria. Elisha prayed again in verse 20, this time for Yahweh to open their eyes once they all had reached Samaria. And the Lord did so.

Read 2 Kings 6:21-23.

When the king of Israel saw the Syrians, he was ready to attack them (v. 21). But Elisha instructed the king to feed them and then send them home (v. 22), and that is what he did—he prepared a great feast for his enemies (v. 23). We can only imagine what Syria's king asked when the troops returned: "Did you slay Elisha?" They would have answered, "No, they fed us a great meal! And we still have leftover pecan pie in our pockets!" God slayed the pride of Ben-hadad. He showed him the folly of opposing the real King of all the earth. Psalm 2 captures this idea: God laughs at the earthly kings who make plots against him (vv. 1-4).

- **What does this account teach us about kindness toward our enemies?**

The story of the Syrian (or Aramean war) displays many glorious attributes of God. We marvel at God's power and sovereignty over all nations. We see God's kindness toward rebel enemies. We read of God's grace in opening up eyes to behold unseen realities. We observe God's protection of Israel and Elisha. And we also see God using His servant, Elisha, during a particularly dark period of Israel's history.

This story also provides a picture of human rebellion and sin. Despite all of God's graces to the king of Syria, the king hardened his heart against God. God humbled this king, fed his army, spared their lives, and extended mercy, yet Ben-hadad refused to bow his knee to Yahweh. This serves as a great warning to all: do not harden your heart against God.

When God shows us grace and mercy, let's be quick to respond with humble faith. Let's pray for eyes to see the wonders of God's grace in Scripture and in our daily lives, and let's respond rightly to that grace with faith and obedience.

- **How does this passage emphasize our need for God to open up our eyes to see God's truth and grace?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Only God can open our eyes to see spiritual realities.

2 Kings 6

17. After Elisha prayed that his servant would see these "soldiers," the man indeed viewed 'the hills full of horses and chariots of fire.' At this point the Lord defended Elisha from death with the same instrument Elijah was protected from death and taken to heaven. Such awareness of God's power must have soothed the servant's shattered nerves. Not content with just protection for himself, Elisha provided safety for all Israel. God struck the Syrian army with blindness at Elisha's request, thus allowing the prophet to lead them to Samaria, about ten miles north of Dothan.[2]

21-23. There is no contradiction between this episode and the one just following. Since God's lessons fell on hardened hearts, it was inevitable that war would be resumed. However, the miraculous capture and release of the Aramean army produced a brief period of peace between the weakened Israelites and the dominant Arameans. But in terms of God's larger purpose of witnessing through miraculous works, they were ineffective for both the Israelites and the Arameans. God's great works can be effective, but the impact of God's truth is determined more by the attitude of hearts than by the wonder of miracles.[3]

Activity

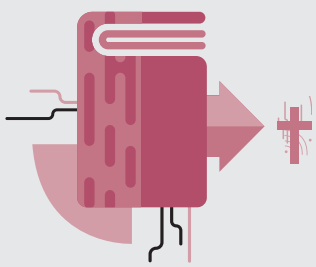
Your students are going to create Elisha's Illustrated Guide for Modern-Day Evangelism. Students should work alone or in pairs. Each student should get a piece of paper; they'll split that paper into two pictures. Give each student or pair one of the three points from today's lesson. The students' job now is to make two illustrations, each with a caption, based on whatever point you assigned them. The first illustration should depict Elisha doing whatever the point was (seeing what others don't, praying for others' eyes to be opened, or calling for mercy and grace). The second illustration should depict Christians doing the modern day equivalent. For example, Christians might see what others don't by "looking" at Jesus in the Bible or in a song. They might pray for others' eyes to be opened corporately or in their private prayers. They might call for mercy and grace by telling others the good news of Jesus and explaining how to get saved. Students should set the second picture in specific a setting as possible. Feel free to assemble the pictures together to make some real Elisha's Illustrated Guide for Modern-Day Evangelism samples for the publisher!

Alternate: you could have students add a third picture showing how Jesus does what Elisha did: how Jesus sees what we in our blindness do not; how Jesus opens our eyes; how Jesus calls us to mercy and grace.

Alternate: if your kids really like to act instead of draw, you could have them act out Elisha and his modern-day equivalent instead of drawing them.

(p. 33, DDG) Christ Connection

Elisha prayed for the eyes of others to be opened so they could see God at work around them. Likewise, Jesus came to give sight to the blind—physically and spiritually—so that they could see that He is Immanuel—God with us.



THE VISION OF GOD'S STRENGTH

2 Kings 6:8–23

THE VISION OF GOD'S STRENGTH

Only God can open our eyes to see spiritual realities.

JESUS CONNECTION

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LIFEWISE QUALITY

KINDNESS – Being considerate, generous and compassionate towards others.

HEAD

How did God protect Elisha when the Aramean king sent his army to capture him?

After the Aramean army was captured and brought to the king of Israel, the king asked Elisha if he should kill them. How did Elisha respond?

HEART

We see God's kindness toward Israel's enemies in this passage. Since God is kind to people who do not deserve it, we can also be kind to our enemies. What is one way you could show kindness to someone who is in one of your classes and continually tries to get you in trouble? How would they react if you did this?

Do you consider kindness to be powerful or weak? Explain.

HANDS

Many times, God shows us kindness when we do not expect it. He will provide what we need, protect us, heal us or give us unexpected blessings. Think of a person in your school, family or community who showed you kindness when you did not deserve or expect it. Write them a letter thanking them for what they did for you. Let them know how it made you feel and what kind of impact it had on you to do the same for others. Send or deliver the letter.